

Chairman and members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Eliana D. Rojas, Assistant Professor of Education at the Neag School of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to hear my testimony.

I am deeply committed to the advancement of EL children and adolescents, particularly Latinos. I have directly experienced the failure of the US educational system for hundreds of children and their families – first as a Middle and High School mathematics teacher in Hartford School's Bilingual programs; then as a parent in Mansfield, CT schools; and finally as a professor of education at the University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education.

I am a Fulbright Senior Specialist who has visited schools in Latin America while representing the US government in various capacities. I am nationally and internationally committed to the education of children in conditions of high vulnerability, such as Language, Culture and Social constraints. As such, my work concentrates on identifying and reinforcing best practices for preservice and in-service teachers and school professionals working with ELs.

Since the ELs community is predicted to become close to 40 % of the students population, in the US and the increasing changes in demographics in Connecticut I propose research based competencies and recommendations be adopted by all school teachers and professionals working in CT schools. To do so, Higher Education Institutions have the responsibility to infuse these practices and its indicators as part of their faculty individual practices.

What set of competencies would you deem essential in the preparation of teachers for our public schools?

Recommendations based on 10 years of research work: 5.0 million dls. USDE - PD Funds

UConn: NEAG School of Education Curriculum and Instruction Bilingual Program

TEACEP/REALL/Math LEAD (STEM) projects:

Expanding the number of course-credits on how to instruct English Language Learners in ALL classrooms should be mandatory for all students preparing to become teachers.

A minimum of 4 courses 3 credit hours for every in-service teacher.

A minimum of 2-3 courses and field experiences required for every undergraduate student seeking CT certification.

A minimum of 2 courses and field experiences required for every schools professional (counselors, school psychologist, social workers, and administrators seeking CT certification.

Special consideration should be given to training and /or professional development for Special Education Teachers working with EL special education students including Gifted and Talented. Culturally and Linguistically relevant identification tools should be implemented to appropriately identify ELs children and adolescents with these special needs.

Course –work needs to emphasize support and embrace research outcomes that inform best practices.

Having the knowledge and then being able to discuss that competently with colleagues, superiors, and parents is invaluable.

Obligatory course work in Spanish or as a language pre-requisite (or other high incidence language).

On site and/or using communication technology experiences:

Student Teachers Placement with teachers who are well trained or who demonstrated best domain of best practices with ELs in particular.

Study abroad should be encouraged and funded: Regions in the world of high incidence, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Collaborations with Latin America and the Caribbean Schools and Higher Ed Institutions: Could use technology applications.

Multiculturalism is important for ALL teachers and schools professionals (counselors, school psychologists administrators etc) entering the public school system, not just those entering, with a focus on bilingual/bicultural education.

Foundationally it is important that new teachers be able to discern the characteristics of ELL students and be able to tailor instruction to provide academic differentiation as well as foster language acquisition.

Educators must understand the impact of underrepresentation (too few Latino-a teachers or schools professionals) and courses should discuss this fact and its implications.

Develop a comprehensive collaborative approach involving all teachers and school professionals in engages in CT teacher preparation programs as a critical step to have a cohesive and consistent approach to educating teachers and other educational professionals to be effective for ALL students.

Offer professionals development based on CT research outcomes—make sure that all professional development is conducted by professionals grounded in Connecticut's realities.

Secure Funds supporting continuation of CT project based findings.

Provide sustained financial support to established programs, particularly those with a proven successful trajectory Incentivize and support teachers engaging in these programs.

Require state wide professional development on best practices including assessment as defined by national and local instructional data

Career ladders for paraprofessionals who have demonstrated competency in working with ELs and who are bicultural and bilingual.

Convene all interested stakeholders, particularly teachers, to discuss reliable and valuable EL assessment tools. Consider assessment as an integral part of the curriculum

Convene state-wide professional institutes to share and discuss successful practices: Encourage participation of all constituency including political leader, public officers

Establish a strong ongoing professional research agenda among research institutions in CT prioritizing participation of project graduates.

Utilize the wealth of knowledge of program graduates and Local Specialist by identifying and supporting leadership roles for said individuals and further leadership opportunities for project graduates.

Require meaningful culturally relevant development for ALL school professionals preferably conducted and led by program graduates in their districts.

Firm State commitment to support Higher Education Institutions which promote the participation and engagement of underrepresented minorities in the teaching career as well as in leadership positions

Results have shown the needs for:

- The newer cohorts have developed a greater sense of community and commitment to the issues faced by EL populations.
- The modifications made in the program have been in tune with the needs mentioned by graduating students. Specifically, advocacy was mentioned as an area of need and the most recent conferences and institutes(with participants such as James Crawford – Stephen Krashen) have focused on Leadership and Advocacy issues.
- Graduates mention specific skills, theories and methodological approaches to teaching in ways that demonstrate their expertise and the impact of their coursework for their professional lives. Their statements reflect a sense of empowerment as they retool to go back into their schools and activate the teaching and learning strategies and understandings gleaned through the program.

- The data collected through our continuous activities to obtain feedback, have informed our decision making to build up and strengthen the design and articulation of the goals and objectives of the REALL and LEAD grants.
- It is clear that an increasing number of practitioners are in need and demand the opportunities offered by these programs.
- Serious effort need to be made to encourage changes in the demography of school teachers and professionals, particularly in leadership positions.
- As professionals educators in a research institution in CT , we see our work as educators as having a strong commitment to our youth in particular to those who do not have a voice, the socially and economically deprived and the disenfranchised.

Assessment:

Convene all interested stakeholders, particularly teachers, to discuss reliable and valuable ELL assessment tools. Consider assessment as an integral part of the curriculum.

Research shows that assessment tools must be relevant to the student's reality, and that in turn these assessments should inform teachers as to the right changes. In my field, the success of EL's depends on those well-defined, continuous and guided evaluation/assessments opportunities. Teachers working in school communities with a broad array of languages and cultural differences need to continuously be informed of their student's progress. Assessment need to be part of Lesson Objectives

During the last 10 years, I have successfully secured over \$5 Million in grants to develop course work for degrees, certifications, as well as professional development opportunities, followed by research, for more than 300 teachers, counselors, administrators working in schools with a high concentration of EL's in the region (Hartford, Waterbury, Bridgeport , New Haven, Windham, Vernon, Mansfield, New London, and New Britain). These teachers and education professionals have been instrumental in identifying those competences. They have come to realize how important these "guiding instructions for EL's success" assessment tools have been in helping teachers, counselors, administrators, and students alike.

Our teachers and school professionals are aware of the effectiveness of these processes; so far they themselves are training other professionals with these powerful tools and competences. We support also the need to inform and empower all teachers with those instructional and assessment tools and instructional capacities. Although our EL's community continues to growth in CT, many districts continue to deny us access to their communities. Some schools districts have been damaged by the irresponsible measures and irreversible luck of accountability through state intervention.

Our research show that most teachers who work with culturally, linguistically and socially diverse children want access to effective practices including evaluations for improvement of those practices and as a consequence improve student's achievements and students' success. They just need a voice; I welcome the possibility of representing them and voice their call for hope through your decisions. ,

Eliana D. Rojas

Eliana D Rojas. PhD. Fulbright Senior Specialist

Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
Teacher Education/Mathematics. Linguistic/Socio/Cultural Diversity

Director/PI: REALL/ELLs Pedagogy Graduate Project

Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut
NCATE: National Center for Accreditation in Teacher Education: Local officer
Comité Iberoamericano de Educación Matemática/ CIAEM-USA
National Board: TODOS-Mathematics for All-NCTM

Cell: 860-208-7940
860 481 0734

